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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BUCHAREST 000687

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ENRG](#) [ECON](#) [MD](#) [GG](#) [RS](#) [RO](#)  
SUBJECT: BASESCU TELLS SEN. LUGAR ROMANIA FACING HARD  
CHOICES IN WAKE OF GEORGIA CONFLICT

Classified By: DCM JERI GUTHRIE-CORN FOR 1.4 (B) AND (D).

#### SUMMARY

11. (C) President Traian Basescu told Senator Richard Lugar on August 27 that he fears that Russian recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, coming in the wake of U.S./European recognition of Kosovo, has begun a process which threatens to unravel the existing international legal architecture and create widespread instability in Europe. Characterizing Russia's incursion into Georgia as part of a bold new effort to reassert control over Russia's "near abroad," including Eastern Europe, Basescu argued that the West must counter Russia with a reinvigorated effort to resolve frozen conflicts and restore respect for international law through the U.N. Security Council (UNSC). Basescu fretted about Romanian security vulnerabilities in the Black Sea and the implications of events in Georgia for Moldova/Transnistria, saying any Russian provocation against Moldova's "4.5 million Romanian citizens" would put Romania in a serious quandary. Basescu argued that NATO and EU action in confronting Russia must go beyond "statements" and that a more robust policy toward the Black Sea region should include repositioning of NATO military assets. End Summary.

BASESCU: FAILURE TO RESOLVE FROZEN CONFLICTS A "HUGE MISTAKE"

12. (C) President Basescu and his top security advisers met on August 27 with visiting Senator Richard G. Lugar, accompanied by the Ambassador, DCM, and Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) staff. Opening with some observations from his recent Caucasus trip, including to Georgia, Basescu said he believes recent events illustrated two main points: 1) failure of the international community to deal with frozen conflicts has been a "huge mistake," as these situations can explode unexpectedly; and 2) the existing European order -- founded upon the territorial integrity of multiethnic states and respect for international law -- is gravely threatened. Basescu characterized Russian recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as a direct response to the West's recognition of an independent Kosovo, and complained that both cases, in Romania's view, involved "violations" of UNSC resolutions and undermining of the existing international legal regime.

13. (C) Russia will continue systematically to exploit such situations in order to re-exert its influence over former Soviet states and even Eastern Europe, Basescu said, unless NATO and the EU, along with the rest of the international community, mount a vigorous and coordinated response. This must include restoring UNSC legitimacy, creating a single framework under UNSC auspices to deal with all frozen conflicts, and insisting that Security Council decisions be respected. Basescu also expressed concern that the "flawed"

French-mediated ceasefire agreement not form the basis of a new UNSC resolution without substantial modifications. Senator Lugar agreed that a renewed push in the Security Council to resolve frozen conflicts was the appropriate mechanism and said he would encourage the U.S. Administration to follow this approach.

¶4. (C) Basescu did not reserve all his criticism for Russia. Reflecting on his discussions with Georgian President Saakashvili, Basescu said he was "shocked" at the "adventurers" in the Georgian Government who had rushed so willingly into "provoking" the Russians; Saakashvili had demonstrated a "huge lack of maturity." This strategic blunder was followed by a succession of military errors, particularly in not blocking the Roki Tunnel through which pre-positioned Russian forces were able to move quickly into South Ossetia. Basescu speculated whether Georgia's poor military performance could in fact have been a tactic intended to draw NATO into coming to Georgia's defense. In any case, years of Western investment in Georgia's economy are "lost" and must be painstakingly rebuilt, Basescu said. Sen. Lugar agreed that the Russians had been concentrating troops in the area for some time and had been looking for an opportunity to paint Georgia as the aggressor; the U.S. had actively cautioned Georgia to show restraint.

GEORGIA A HARBINGER OF MOLDOVA/TRANSNISTRIA?

¶5. (C) Basescu was openly fearful about the implications of the Georgia conflict for Moldova/Transnistria. He asserted that while Romania respects Moldova's independence, its citizens are "4.5 million Romanians" who are "part of our

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nation." Basescu recalled that during the 1991-92 conflict in Moldova, Romania had sent extensive supplies and munitions to the Moldovan side, but he wondered aloud what Romania's appropriate response should be now as a NATO member in response to any Russian provocation there. Asked by Senator Lugar whether NATO membership would restrain Romania from acting, Basescu replied that Romania would have to consider the views of the Alliance so as not to pull others into a conflict, but would be under intense pressure to respond -- "we would face very tough choices." Basescu asked, almost rhetorically, whether NATO and the EU would stand with Romania in such a situation, saying it could come down to a stark decision for the Romanians between the "EU approach of generating statements" or "actually helping" the Moldovans.

¶6. (C) Drawing a further parallel with events in South Ossetia, Basescu observed that substantial elements of the Russian 14th Army are present in Transnistria as "peacekeepers." Removal of these forces must be a top priority, he said, since Russia had used the excuse of defending its peacekeepers as one pretext for intervention in Georgia. Asked whether Russia has been receptive to Romanian diplomatic initiatives on Transnistria, Basescu replied that he has discussed the conflict with Putin "at least five times" but that Russia refuses to respect the 1999 Istanbul agreement. Basescu ridiculed the reasons Russia has given for not withdrawing its forces from Transnistria. The Russians in this and all other frozen conflict zones must be replaced with international troops under a U.N. mandate, because "we create the opportunity for this kind of intervention by accepting the presence of Russian peacekeepers there," he said. Basescu noted that he would be meeting with the Russian Ambassador that same afternoon and would tell him Romania will support any European Council decision to offer deployment of EU troops as replacements for Russian forces. He said he would also challenge the Ambassador over whether Russia continues to support the Security Council and intends to abide by UNSC resolutions in the future.

NABUCCO: "WE MUST CONCLUDE AN INTER-GOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT"

17. (C) Turning to the implications for energy policy of the Georgia conflict, Basescu observed that Russia may not have to resort to military means to force solutions more to its liking. Control of energy resources is a new tool of influence even more effective than the Red Army, he said. While agreeing that Russia wants to destroy the "European project of Nabucco," Basescu asserted that the project remains viable but that its biggest challenge is really European lack of resolve. Georgia has changed nothing with regard to Nabucco, except perhaps in the minds of other European states, similar to the way some in Europe have used the difficulty of negotiating with Turkey as an excuse for inaction on Nabucco. However, Basescu said he is personally engaging Turkey's leaders and believes a diplomatic resolution is within reach. In the wake of the Georgian conflict, and with Turkey firmly at the table, now is the time to push forcefully to conclude a Nabucco Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA). Romania does not believe in Russia's South Stream, and Caspian leaders have told him they desperately want transit alternatives for their energy resources to Europe which do not rely on Russia, Basescu observed. Sen. Lugar responded that he believes the Turks are now firmly behind Nabucco, and that rapid conclusion of an IGA would be a welcome and unexpected diplomatic coup in the face of Russian intimidation.

THE BLACK SEA: WHERE ARE NATO AND THE EU?

18. (C) Basescu argued that Russia's resurgence creates a new strategic imperative for NATO and the EU in the Black Sea. He expressed near paranoia over the dispute between Russia and Ukraine regarding the Black Sea Fleet at Sevastopol and the threat the Fleet may pose to Romania's coasts. Observing that Turkey shares Russia's position that NATO naval forces should stay out of the Black Sea, a policy Turkey enforces through control of the Bosphorus passage, Basescu insisted that NATO allies must consult with Turkey to change this. He also urged that NATO "equilibrate" its presence in the Black Sea region by redistributing forces now committed in "distant" areas. Responding to Sen. Lugar's expression of appreciation for Romanian military support in Afghanistan, Basescu reaffirmed that Romania will uphold its NATO obligations. However, in the face of potential Russian

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aggression, Romania is relying on NATO for its defense but "NATO is all in Afghanistan now," he said. Events in Georgia, and their implications for Transnistria, have changed the nature of the game in Romania's view. "They are at least as important to Romanians as Iran," Basescu quipped (a not-so-subtle dig at U.S. policy priorities). Romania is a growing economy and has more resources to devote to defense, but cannot shoulder the burden of Black Sea security alone; NATO and the EU must assign greater importance to the area, Basescu concluded.

COMMENT

19. (C) Basescu came to the meeting well-prepared to deliver a direct message. Romania firmly believes that recognition of Kosovo set a dangerous precedent which the Russians are now moving forcefully to exploit, and that the basic premise of territorial integrity for multiethnic nation states -- a key requirement for Romania's NATO accession -- is now in serious jeopardy. Basescu also forcefully advocated for a reaffirmation by the international community of respect for international law and the primacy of the UNSC in order to blunt Russian expansionism and defuse other potential flashpoints. Most striking, however, was the centrality in Basescu's thinking of the Moldova/Transnistria conflict and Black Sea security generally in the wake of events in Georgia. Basescu clearly worries that the Russians may trigger a similar provocation in Moldova which would practically require a Romanian military response, with broad implications for the EU and NATO. As a consequence, especially with national elections approaching, holding the

Romanians to their extensive commitments in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere will be a political challenge if a more pressing threat in their minds looms close to home. End Comment.

TAUBMAN